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Viewing cable 07MANAGUA179, FOREIGN MINISTER SANTOS STRUGGLES TO JUGGLE THE

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07MANAGUA179	2007-01-23 15:56	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-04-25/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2743916.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-04-25/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2743919.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-04-25/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2743922.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-04-25/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2752792.aspx>

VZCZCXRO5847
PP RUEHLMC
DE RUEHMU #0179/01 0231556
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 231556Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8725
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0902
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 000179

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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#)

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER SANTOS STRUGGLES TO JUGGLE THE DEMANDS OF HIS NEW JOB

REF: A. MANAGUA 0155

[B](#). MANAGUA 0153

[C](#). MANAGUA 0127

[D](#). MANAGUA 0106

[E](#). 2006 MANAGUA 2741

[F](#). 2006 MANAGUA 2691

[G](#). 2006 MANAGUA 2673

[H](#). 2006 MANAGUA 2624

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

[1](#). (C) Summary: Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Samuel Santos (Refs. E-H) is struggling to juggle the demands and impositions of anti-U.S., populist, authoritarian-minded allies against the concerns and expectations of the U.S. and other like-minded governments. We reminded Santos that any dangers posed to our security here by Iran or any other government would seriously test U.S.-Nicaraguan cooperation. Santos insisted that the GON will "not permit Iran to threaten the U.S. presence here," but offered no response to our concern that President Ortega's personal secretary is reportedly Moammar al-Ghadafi's nephew and linked to Ghadafi's personal intel network. Santos -- who is a wealthy and pragmatic entrepreneur -- appears to be a "bantamweight" in the scheme of Ortega's political power structure, although he enjoys some punch through his apparent close relationship to Rosario Murillo. We can expect him to be helpful within his operational limitations, while he will likely attempt to shirk or downplay the seriousness of any contentious issue we raise with him. End Summary.

Santos Finds MFA in "Disarray"

[2](#). (C) Responding to PolCouns' January 17 phone call to the Foreign Ministry to request copies of the recent bilateral agreements the new Nicaraguan government (GON) recently signed with the Venezuelan and Iranian governments, Foreign Minister Samuel Santos invited PolCouns to meet with him at the Foreign Ministry later in the day. PolCouns found Santos sporting the apparent official office attire of the new Ortega government: a Guayabera-style, white-linen, long-sleeved, four-pocket shirt and dark slacks. ForMin Santos started by fretting over how his predecessor had erased all computerized records and hard drives, leaving him no institutional memory. He was "shocked by this sorry state of affairs" because he had met with former Foreign Minister Caldera on several occasions to facilitate the transition process and had not expected this unfortunate situation. Santos claimed that he had found a recording on his phone instructing everyone to "erase all documents," but was uncertain whether other ministers were in the same predicament.

Assuming Responsibility for Inaugural Faux Pas

[3](#). (C) Foreign Minister Santos -- who was relieved that the presidential inauguration was over -- admitted that the new Nicaraguan government (GON) had made "several mistakes" in the inaugural event (Ref. D). PolCouns, who thanked him for moving the U.S. delegation out of the sun and into shelter to await the start of the inaugural ceremonies, remarked that a number of people in the audience had complained about the almost two-hour delay apparently prompted by Venezuelan President Chavez' late arrival. Santos acknowledged "inconveniences," but then hastily deflected Chavez' role in the delay and assumed "personal responsibility" for the problems. He recounted how Chavez had warned he might arrive later than expected, and thus the Nicaraguans should have changed the onset of the ceremonies to a later hour.

Agreement on Track

14. (SBU) Polcouns confirmed that we are processing the agreement (Refs. A-C) request for Nicaraguan Ambassador-designate Arturo Cruz, adding that we will prepare a briefing for Cruz, similar to the one presented in December (Ref. F) to Daniel Ortega's technical transition team. Pleased with the news, Santos opined that Cruz is an ideal choice for the job. He added that his meetings with Assistant Secretary Shannon and NSC Senior Advisor Dan Fisk

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in early January had been cordial and helpful and he looks forward to another visit to Washington in the near future. As for the meeting with Secretary Leavitt, President Ortega and his team believed it had been "extraordinary." Touching on an eventual visit of President Ortega to Washington, Santos said he prefers that Washington "take the initiative."

In Search of the Elusive MOUs

15. (C) Polcouns turned to the subject that had prompted the meeting: our request for copies of the agreements President Ortega signed with his Venezuelan and Iranian counterparts during their recent visits to Managua. Santos replied that the documents are in the Presidency. He immediately called the Presidency to request them. (Note: To date, we have not received the documents.) Santos outlined the "justification" for the accords, explaining that they serve to "remove the five bottlenecks" that lie between Ortega's campaign promises and his ability to deliver on them:

- Resolve Nicaragua's energy crisis.
- Increase cement production for hydroelectric projects and housing for the poor.
- Improve water distribution and access.
- Provide free education to all Nicaraguans.
- Ensure all Nicaraguans can access free health care.

Iranians offer Housing, Private Sector "Cooperation"

16. (C) According to Santos, Iranian assistance will focus primarily on housing developments for poor Nicaraguans, cooperation in generating hydroelectric power, and the promotion of private sector to private sector "cooperation." He conceded that President Ahmadinejad's visit to Managua had not produced any tangible outcome except the establishment of embassies in each others' capitals. He recognized that the Iranian leader agreed to "consider" forgiving Nicaragua's \$152 debt, but had made no pledge, although he did promise to consider swapping the debt for "development projects" in Nicaragua.

17. (C) PolCouns voiced our concerns regarding the establishment of an Iranian embassy in Managua, reminding Santos that we will have a serious bilateral issue on our hands that could test U.S.-Nicaraguan cooperation if the Iranians exploit Nicaragua to endanger our security. Santos noted the message and insisted that the GON will "not permit Iran to threaten the U.S. presence here." Polcouns also conveyed our concern over President Ortega's appointment of Libyan-Nicaraguan Muhammad Lashtar (reportedly Moammar al-Ghadafi's nephew and linked to Ghadafi's personal intel network).

18. (C) Foreign Minister Santos next recounted how Ahmadinejad had "assured" him that U.S.-Iranian relations are actually "quite good," not like they are portrayed on the

international stage. PolCouns interjected, reminding the Foreign Minister that the U.S. official position on Iran is clearly known, as is the UN Security Council's. Further, the EU shares our concern over Iran's efforts to become a nuclear power. Santos, who quickly acknowledged that Ahmadinejad may have been manipulating the situation, proceeded to downplay the Iranian president's intervention in Managua, asserting that in his remarks, Ahmadinejad did not directly attack the United States, but instead, referred to "imperialism" in general.

¶9. (C) Referring to Ahmadinejad's interview in left-leaning Nicaraguan daily El Nuevo Diario (septel), PolCouns remarked that there was little reasonable or accurate in the article; the Iranian president's implying that the Holocaust never occurred is an unacceptable revisionist fabrication and an example of why Ahmadinejad's word is untrustworthy. Polcouns recounted that her family had relatives who perished in the Holocaust. Santos hastened to offer his view that Ahmadinejad "was wrong on this point" and said he did not

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agree with Ahmadinejad's position.

¶10. (C) Santos then recounted his "surprise" when Ahmadinejad told him the Iranian government recognizes the new Iraqi government and that bilateral relations are cordial. PolCouns clarified that the Iranian-Iraqi bilateral relationship given both governments are Shi'a dominated. Noting that the former Nicaraguan foreign minister had told us the GON never broke diplomatic relations with Iraq, she suggested that Santos consider meeting with his Iraqi counterpart to discuss the possibility of reviving relations. Santos appeared amenable to the idea and said he will pursue it.

¶11. (C) Santos then shared his astonishment when the Iranian president told him that Saddam Hussein was a "monster" and was responsible for the murder of thousands of Iraqis and Iranians. Polcouns shared her "surprise" that the FSLN needed the Iranian president to recount this fact to believe it when it has been common knowledge for years that Hussein committed gross atrocities against his people. She referenced Ortega's December 30, 2006 communique referring to Hussein as Iraq's legitimate president, which made no mention of the atrocities he committed against his own people -- while it accused the "occupation" of committing a "cruel genocide."

Venezuelans Deliver Tangible Assistance

¶12. (C) While Santos conceded that Iran was equivocal on debt forgiveness, he asserted that Venezuela's commitment is tangible -- citing the fact that President Chavez had condoned Nicaragua's \$32-million debt. He related how Chavez's assistance to the FSLN had started over two years ago -- including urea and oil donations and "other assistance." Polcouns raised the incongruence between Chavez' ALBA and his stated plan to help Nicaragua and other poor nations by offering favorable loan terms on Venezuelan crude -- while he hurt the poor in his attempts to raise world oil prices. Santos conceded that Chavez is "looking out for his own interests," and his support for Nicaragua is "not free." He explained that part of the urgency to boost Nicaragua's agricultural production is to swap beans and other agricultural commodities to the Venezuelans for oil.

Making Deals with God and the Devil

¶13. (C) Expanding on the topic of foreign assistance, Santos elaborated that Nicaragua cannot afford to refuse Venezuelan or any other foreign assistance. However, it does not behoove Nicaragua to meddle in conflicts between donor governments; the GON will work with everyone and encourage

donors to settle their differences elsewhere, asserted Santos, who cited Nicaragua's relations with both Taiwan and China as a case in point.

Comment

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¶14. (C) Santos -- who is a wealthy, pragmatic entrepreneur -- appears to be a "bantamweight" in the scheme of Ortega's political power structure, although he enjoys some punch through his apparent close relationship to Rosario Murillo. We can expect him to be helpful within his operational limitations, while he will likely attempt to shirk or downplay the seriousness of any contentious issue we raise with him. For all the Sandinista government's anti-imperialist rhetoric and assertion that Nicaragua will not fall into the orbit of any other country, the GON appears to be in a rush to auction Nicaragua's sovereignty and national pride to the highest bidder -- at this point, Chavez.
TRIVELLI